

I had always viewed art as a way to express oneself and visualize a person in pieces and parts when the whole was not fully understood. During the COVID pandemic of 2020 - 2022, I was separated from my friends and peers and given ample time to focus my attention inwards. The pieces I created during this time reflected how I broke down my identity, gender, and personality to build myself anew. I applied this theme of identity to each piece I created in the last two years, but my most exemplary pieces showcased the theme through paintings and drawings. Illustration was the first medium I ever worked with and as such had the most development. I learned how to draw subjects first in my own cartoon style before evolving to draw realistically by eye. I ordered my exhibition pieces to show my identity developing process.

Two of my pieces share a connection in perspective and self-reflection, as well as their medium of digital illustration. "Facing the Rain" observes how I view myself and where and who I will be in the future. I am alone in the piece as rain and light pour around me, and while the piece was created at the very start of 2020, it would unknowingly reflect my state of being during the following years. Regardless of the uncertain future, I face forward unwavering with an intense look in my eyes, and I wanted that look to shake the viewer even though my gaze was not trained on them. This is further emphasized by the bold lines of the hair cutting through the background and the blue shirt looking more bold against the piece's warmer tones.

This piece's meaning is reflected in a piece I made two years later, "Facing the Future". I changed the piece's subjects to that of my siblings, all digitally rendered from a different angle. This was inspired by Paul Cézanne's pieces whose perspective often changed as he moved his location during the painting process. The distinctly different angles and color palettes serve to separate my siblings and focus on the theme of isolation, and the look of resolve in their eyes connects it closely to "Facing the Rain". It again represents a determination to face the challenges the future presents, this time with the experience of having gone through a year in a pandemic. I hoped that the viewer could find themselves in the wildly different angles and colors of the piece but still feel connected to each panel and through an intimate familiarity with the pandemic's effects.

Another two pieces connect my progress in developing my identity directly to elements from nature. "Seasons of Change" was heavily inspired by Mucha's "Seasons" (1897) in color palette and composition. I symbolized how I viewed myself throughout my life in each distinctive season, which implied how that view often fluctuates. I depicted myself as confident and self-assured in Summer, with more exposed skin and a laid-back posture. In Autumn, I painted myself in my typical self-image, wearing comfortable clothes, attentive and observant. Finally, in Winter I was most closed off, covering myself and hunched over. Each of these panels generally symbolized my self-confidence in how I was perceived by others, and my message to the viewer through this piece was that one's perception of themselves is fluid and changes with time.

The piece that connects closely to "Seasons of Change" in its representation of my identity through nature is "The Sun". This was the largest painting I had ever created at 4ft by 4ft, and I intentionally made it as large as possible to imply a sense of grandeur and grand revelation. I am looking down at the viewer in this piece, connecting back to the sense of being judged that I sought to imply in "Facing the Rain". I used symbols of growth, time, legacy, and passion across the whole piece in the form of butterflies, hour glasses, clocks, and fire. The accompanying poem I wrote is what first inspired this piece, grounded in my belief that while my passion to create art can sometimes be self-destructive, its purpose in rendering the ideas in my head would always be paramount.